



Ghislaine Maxwell was crucial in ensuring Jeffery Epstein's access to Trump's world. | Laura Cavanaugh/Getty Images

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Meet the woman who ties Jeffrey Epstein to Trump and the Clintons

Heiress Ghislaine Maxwell paved the way to presidents.

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How did wealthy sex offender Jeffrey Epstein come to be palling around with Bill Clinton and Donald Trump?

People who know those involved said Epstein's connections to two U.S. presidents ran through one bubbly British heiress: Ghislaine Maxwell.

Maxwell, who has denied accusations made in civil suits of aiding and participating in Epstein's sexual abuse of minors, has been among the financier's closest associates. Unlike Epstein, she comes from a rarefied background that gave her entrée to the rich and powerful.

For years, beginning in the early '90s, she and Epstein cut glittering figures on the Manhattan, N.Y., and Palm Beach, Fla., social circuits, with Maxwell taking the lead. While people who knew Epstein in Palm Beach described him as "very odd" and said "he didn't go out much," those who know Maxwell described her as "vivacious," "warm" and "effusive."

Her family knew Trump before Epstein arrived on the scene, and she continued to socialize with Chelsea Clinton after Epstein was jailed on sex offenses.

Maxwell first grew close with the Clintons after Bill Clinton left office, vacationing on a yacht with Chelsea Clinton in 2009, attending her wedding in 2010, and participating in the Clinton Global Initiative as recently as 2013, years after her name first emerged in accounts of Epstein's alleged sexual abuse.

"Ghislaine was the contact between Epstein and Clinton," a person familiar with the relationship said. "She ended up being close to the family because she and Chelsea ended up becoming close." Lawyers for Maxwell did not respond to requests for comment, and a spokesperson for Clinton disputed the idea that the two women were ever close.

Trump's ties to Maxwell and her late father, the publishing tycoon Robert Maxwell, meanwhile, go back even further, to at least the late 1980s.

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Trump plays down calling Jeffrey Epstein a 'terrific guy', defends Acosta
true

"He really likes her," said Steven Hoffenberg, a former mentor to Epstein who pleaded guilty in 1995 to running a massive Ponzi scheme, of Trump and Maxwell. "He was friendly with her father."

In the 1980s, Trump and Robert Maxwell, the Czechoslovak-born owner of London's Daily Mirror tabloid, rubbed shoulders on the high-flying Manhattan party circuit.

An item from a May 1989 gossip column placed Trump and both Maxwells at a party aboard the elder Maxwell's yacht, named the Lady Ghislaine, that featured caviar flown in from Paris and former Republican Sen. John Tower of Texas. The item notes that Trump compared his own larger yacht with Maxwell's.

As it happened, Trump's yacht, the Trump Princess, had originally belonged to the Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi — the uncle of slain Washington Post contributor Jamal Khashoggi — and Maxwell's yacht had originally belonged to one of Adnan's [brothers](#).

Two years later, Maxwell fell off his yacht in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and drowned, a sensational death that was ruled accidental.

"He was a character and a colorful guy, and I think we were lucky to have seen even a short time of him in New York," Trump told Larry King during an appearance on CNN two weeks later. "He was my kind of a guy."

Maxwell's biographer later related an incident from around the same period when his daughter was working for one of his business enterprises selling corporate gifts.

While planning a trip to New York, she asked her father to use his friendship with Trump to get her a meeting with the real estate mogul.

"Have you got your bum in your head?" the elder Maxwell responded, according to an account by the late Nicholas Davies, a Mirror editor who wrote Maxwell's biography. "Why the f--- would Donald Trump want to waste his time seeing you with your crappy gifts when he has a multimillion-dollar business to run?"

It appears the elder Maxwell sold his daughter short. A 1997 New Yorker [profile](#) of Trump notes that the article's author shared a ride to Palm Beach on Trump's private jet with Ghislaine Maxwell, as well as a teenage Eric Trump and Matthew Calamari, a longtime member of Trump's private security team.

It is unclear whether Ghislaine Maxwell first introduced Trump and Epstein, who socialized together at least as early as 1992, but she was crucial in ensuring Epstein's access to Trump's world. Archival [video](#) unearthed on Wednesday by NBC from that year shows Trump and Epstein surrounded by dancing women at Mar-a-Lago, with Maxwell smiling in the background.



In this courtroom artist's sketch, Jeffrey Epstein (center) sits with attorneys Martin Weinberg (left) and Marc Fernich during his

arraignment in New York federal court on July 8. | Elizabeth Williams via AP

"Ghislaine was his path to social acceptance," said Thomas Volscho, a professor at the City University of New York who has been researching Epstein. "They don't always accept you. Ghislaine was really a conduit for him to start to socialize with people who are way beyond his level."

According to "Filthy Rich," a 2016 book about Epstein by best-selling author and Mar-a-Lago member James Patterson, "Although Epstein had never properly joined the club, Trump's friendship with Ghislaine Maxwell gave Epstein unlimited use of the facilities."

Virginia Roberts Giuffre, a former changing room attendant at Mar-a-Lago who has accused Epstein of sexually abusing her when she was a minor, alleges in a lawsuit that she was first approached at the club in 1998 by Ghislaine Maxwell, who persuaded her to meet Epstein and joined him in the abuse. Maxwell has denied wrongdoing.

It is unclear whether Maxwell ever officially joined the club. A directory of Mar-a-Lago members obtained by POLITICO in 2016 does not contain her name. Private clubs generally do not disclose information about members. In several calls to Mar-a-Lago's main line, staffers said no one was on hand to field media inquiries and suggested calling back at other times. The White House did not respond to an email requesting comment.

But her visits to Mar-a-Lago spanned at least the better part of a decade.

Trump, his future wife Melania, Epstein and Maxwell were all photographed together at the club in 2000. That year, Epstein and Maxwell were also [spotted](#) at the club with Prince Andrew, according to the Daily Mail. According to The Daily Telegraph, it was Maxwell who introduced Epstein to the British royal, whose association with the sex offender has been a long-running scandal in the United Kingdom. Epstein also attended a birthday party for Queen Elizabeth at Windsor Castle in 2000. That same year, Maxwell and Prince Andrew [attended](#) what the Daily Mail described as a "hookers and pimps"-themed Halloween party hosted by Heidi Klum.

A month later, in early December 2000, Trump, his future wife Melania, Epstein and Maxwell all attended a surprise 60th birthday for Barbara Amiel, a British socialite, that was also attended by the likes of Anna Wintour, Charlie Rose and William F. Buckley.

Tina Brown, a notable magazine editor, recalled that around this period Maxwell would reach out to her to socialize when Prince Andrew came to New York. "She was a bit mysterious," Brown recalled.

One regular on the social scene in Palm Beach and other exclusive locales recalled attending an event at Ascot, the English horse track, around the late 1990s, where, upon entering the racetrack's "royal enclosure," the person saw Epstein sitting with the royal family.

Much of Epstein's access to Clinton's world also flowed through Maxwell. "The Clintons were relatively intimate with her," a Maxwell friend said.

In 2002 and 2003, flight logs reportedly [show](#) that Bill Clinton flew on 26 flight legs on Epstein's private jet.

"President Clinton knows nothing about the terrible crimes Jeffrey Epstein pleaded guilty to in Florida some years ago, or those with which he has been recently charged in New York," Clinton spokesman Angel Urena said in a statement. Urena said the flight legs comprised four trips in 2002 and 2003 and that staff and Secret Service were present on all flights. Urena said Epstein visited Clinton at his Harlem office once in 2002 and that he briefly visited Epstein's apartment one time.

Maxwell's ties to Clintonworld, meanwhile, would last another decade.

One friend of Maxwell's, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, described their surprise upon showing up at a dinner party at her Upper East Side apartment around 2005 to find Doug Band, then a top adviser to Bill Clinton and the Clinton Foundation, among the 8 to 10 guests. In 2006, a charity run by Epstein, C.O.U.Q. Foundation, gave \$25,000 to the Clinton Foundation, the Daily Beast [reported](#).

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Billionaire Jeffrey Epstein accused of sexually abusing underage girls

But allegations of misconduct by Epstein, and then Maxwell, began to pile up, making their associations feel increasingly fraught. In 2006, it emerged that police in Palm Beach were investigating Epstein for allegedly soliciting underage girls for sex, and he would eventually plead guilty to sex offenses, serving jail time in Florida. For several

years after, allegations about Maxwell's involvement in Epstein's misconduct escalated in severity.

In 2007, the Daily Mail reported allegations by a woman named Johanna Sjoberg that Maxwell recruited her to work for Epstein, who then induced her "to perform demeaning sexual services." The paper reported, "There is no suggestion that Ghislaine was aware that some of the girls were underage, or aware of Jeffrey's sexual requests." In 2009, Giuffre filed a lawsuit in which she alleged she was recruited by Maxwell as a 15-year-old to work for Epstein, who proceeded to sexually abuse her. That year, the New York Post [reported](#) that Maxwell was served with a subpoena by a lawyer representing some of Epstein's accusers as she left a Clinton Global Initiative conference.

In March 2011, Giuffre [elaborated](#) on her claims, telling the Daily Mail that Maxwell instructed her to take off her clothes as she was massaging Epstein, who proceeded to have sex with her. Maxwell issued a statement [denying](#) the claim. In 2015, Giuffre [accused](#) Maxwell in a court filing of engaging in sex with underage girls.

"It wasn't until 2015 that Chelsea and [her husband] Marc became aware of the horrific allegations against Ghislaine Maxwell and hope that all the victims find justice," said Chelsea Clinton's chief of staff, Bari Lurie. "Chelsea and Marc were friendly with her because of her relationship with a dear friend of theirs. When that relationship ended, Chelsea and Marc's friendship with her ended as well."

For several years, Maxwell was romantically linked with Ted Waitt, the billionaire founder of Gateway Inc..

A person close to Chelsea Clinton described Waitt as a "very close family friend" of Clinton and her husband, Marc Mezvinsky, and said the couple met Maxwell through him in 2011. The person said Clinton and her husband ended their friendship with Maxwell when she and Waitt broke up in early 2011, and disputed that Maxwell and Chelsea Clinton were ever "close."

Two people familiar with the relationship between Maxwell and the Clintons said Maxwell, Clinton and Mezvinsky flew together on a private plane to rendezvous with Waitt for a trip on Waitt's yacht. One of those people said the trip took place in 2009.

Waitt, whose philanthropic endeavors focus on the world's oceans, has [given](#) somewhere between \$10 million and \$25 million to the Clinton Foundation. Waitt's philanthropic foundation did not respond to a request for comment.

One person familiar with the Maxwell-Clinton relationship said that while Maxwell “was incredibly close” to Chelsea Clinton, “She had her own relationship with Bill Clinton and was very close to him.”

In 2010, Maxwell attended Chelsea Clinton’s wedding, apparently as Waitt’s date. In 2012, Maxwell launched her own Ocean-focused charity, the TerraMar Project. A year later, the Clinton Global Initiative trumpeted a TerraMar initiative among the “commitments to action” [announced](#) at its annual meeting. No money changed hands.

The initiative was the Sustainable Oceans Alliance, which sought to ensure the United Nations included oceans in its Sustainable Development Goals.

A 2013 [news release](#) on the website for TerraMar — which announced it was shuttering in the days after Epstein’s arrest — describes the alliance as a four-way partnership between TerraMar; another nonprofit called the Global Partnerships Forum; the late Stuart Beck, who served as “ambassador on oceans and seas” from the Pacific island nation of Palau; and a Trump friend, Paolo Zampolli, an Italian-born businessman who has served in diplomatic posts for Caribbean nations.

Before his diplomatic career, Zampolli co-founded a model management company and served as the Trump Organization’s director of international development. He has long been credited with introducing Trump to his third wife, Melania, though The New York Times [reported](#) this month that Epstein has also claimed credit for the introduction.

Zampolli said he was unaware of Maxwell’s connection to the Sustainable Oceans Alliance but that he does recall that Beck — who served on TerraMar’s board in 2013 — brought Maxwell to the United Nations twice to discuss her oceans advocacy.

TerraMar sought to build social networks around ocean protection, issuing free “Ocean Passports” to anyone who pledged to support its goals, making them an “ocean citizen.”

Zampolli said that some of the proposals conflicted with U.N. rules.

“This lady,” he recalled, “had some very interesting ideas.”